

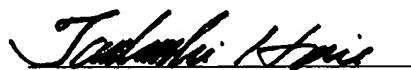
REMARKS:

The present invention as amended above has a chamber inside which a guide path is provided. The chamber has ducts which each connect the chamber to the insertion portion of each wafer processing apparatus. A mobile element moves along the guide path and transports processed wafers from one wafer station to another while taking in and out the wafers through the ducts. As Applicants argued in the amendment submitted on November 5, 2001, wafers are transported from one processing apparatus to another as being subjected to different treatments at apparatuses. A great care must be paid to prevent any contamination of wafers during processing. The care must be paid not only when the wafers are processed at the processing apparatuses but also when the wafers are being transported between processing apparatuses. A makeshift measure for preventing contamination of wafers which are being transported between processing apparatuses is to place the entire processing system in a large clean room. As easily predicted, however, it would be costly to maintain high air purity inside a large room.

In the present invention, wafers are carried through a chamber and ducts while being transported between processing apparatuses. In the present invention, a large clean room is not needed. High air purity may be maintained only inside the chamber and ducts. The smaller the space is where high air purity should be maintained, the less costly and the more manageable the air control becomes. None of the cited references, WO 98/19333, Hansen et al and Miller, discloses or teaches the chamber connected through the ducts to the wafer processing apparatuses.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tadashi Horie
Registration No. 40,437
Attorney for Applicant

BRINKS HOFER GILSON & LIONE
P.O. BOX 10395
CHICAGO, IL 60610
(312)321-4200

APPENDIX 1

1. A wafer conveyance system, comprising:
a chamber having a plurality of outgoing ducts from its circumference, each connecting to an insertion portion of each one of a plurality of wafer processing apparatuses;
a guide path provided in said chamber;
a mobile element movable along said guide path, and capable of receiving one or more processed wafers, via said duct , from said insertion portion of one of said wafer processing apparatus, of holding and transporting said one or more wafers, and of transferring said one or more wafers, via said duct, to said insertion portion of another wafer processing apparatus.
[a plurality of wafer processing apparatuses each having an insertion portion;
a guide path defined along said plurality of wafer processing apparatuses;
a mobile element movable along said guide path; and
a wafer exchange element provided on said mobile element, and capable of removing one or more processed wafers from said insertion portion of one said wafer processing apparatuses, of holding and transporting said one or more wafers, and transferring said one or more wafers to said insertion portion of another wafer processing apparatus.]

Appendix 2

12. A conveyance system in accordance with claim 10, wherein said position detecting element comprises a plurality of mobile element detecting sensors placed along said guide path, and said mobile element detecting sensors are placed at regular distance intervals throughout the guide path or placed at narrower intervals near the wafer processing apparatuses than along midways between adjacent two wafer processing apparatuses.

APPENDIX 3

13. A conveyance system in accordance with claim 1, [further comprising a space forming element for forming a closed space such as to enclose said guide path inside which said mobile element moves along said guide path;] wherein the degree of air purity in said chamber [inside said closed space formed by said space forming means] is higher than the degree of purity outside said chamber [space].